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RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME 0002
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH AFB UK
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP/ASD-HD//
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001133

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USDA FAS WASHDC FOR FAA/ RANDY HAGER
USDA FOR OSEC/WAYNE MOLSTAD
USDA FOR APHIS/JOHN SHAW

FROM OFFICE OF AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS, LAGOS

E.O. 12958, N/A

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SUBJECT: BIRD FLU SPREADS TO SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

REF: ABUJA 1791

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1. (SBU) Summary. The H5N1 avian influenza (AI) virus is spreading at an alarming rate in Southwest Nigeria, the region which accounts for about 80 percent of poultry production in Nigeria. President Obasanjo's poultry farm in Ota, Ogun State, reportedly has been severely affected. Many Poultry operators and government officials are deliberately withholding information about the spread of the disease to avoid negative consumer reaction. The federal government continues to declare victory against AI despite contrary facts on the ground. In Lagos State alone, the virus has spread to several local government areas, affecting approximately forty small- to medium-scale farmers. The situation is the same in neighboring Ogun, Oyo and Osun States. End summary.

2. (SBU) After several months of widespread reports of the avian influenza in Northern Nigeria, the disease is now prevalent in Southwest Nigeria, which accounts for about 80 percent of commercial poultry production in the country. According to the Lagos State chapter of the Poultry Association of Nigeria, an estimated 1 million birds have been lost to the virus in the state in the past two months, with half of the losses occurring between August 8 and August 20, 2006. The situation is the same in the neighboring Southwestern states of Oyo, Ogun and Osun. Reportedly, the disease has visited President Obasanjo's poultry farm in Ota, Ogun State, one of the largest operations in the state, according to industry contacts. Although there has not been any laboratory confirmation of H5N1 on the president's farm, high mortality was reported on the farm and all live birds at the farm have either been sold or removed to other locations in the state.

3. (U) Generally, Nigerian poultry farmers conceal and sell

off stocks rather than report the flu to the authorities. This is because the compensation of 250 naira per bird promised by the Federal Government is considered inadequate, and payment is slow. In addition, affected farmers complain that state and federal government authorities lack even the most basic resources such as transportation and manpower to mount a meaningful response. In most cases, by the time the disease is confirmed, all the birds at a farm would have died of the disease. The GON only compensates farmers for birds depopulated, not those killed by the disease. Industry contacts report that farmers quickly sell off their flocks to avoid losses when they begin to experience high mortality rates, regardless of the type of illness. Major market locations within Lagos State are also recording high mortality rates.

¶4. (U) Poultry farmers under the umbrella of the Poultry Association of Nigeria appealed to the GON to increase the level of compensation and to assist affected farmers to restock. In the meantime, several farmers in the region have vaccinated their flocks in contravention of GON's directive not to vaccinate. The poultry industry and the government continue to show no interest in informing the public about the dire situation. We have recently talked to the Lagos State Agricultural Commissioner about the need to inform the public. The Commissioner promised to initiate information campaign alerting the public in the coming days.

¶5. (U) The federal government finally established compensation coordinators at the state level to implement a \$9 million "relief" program as part of the \$50 million World Bank loan for Nigeria. The new compensation guidelines will consider the cost of production as the basis for compensation rather than using a fixed price. Therefore, the compensation price is expected to vary based on the type of breed and operation (layers, broilers, etc.).

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¶6. (SBU) In a conversation with the AgAttache on August 22, the Lagos State Veterinary Service and the GON's Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) acknowledged the magnitude of the problem and the states' overwhelming needs for assistance from the federal government. The Lagos State poultry association is planning to organize several workshops on biosecurity in cooperation with state and federal offices, but has no plans to undertake a high-profile public campaign. Lagos State veterinary offices report that none of the workers examined by health authorities have tested positive for AI, but details as to how many farms were visited and when remain sketchy.

¶7. (U) On August 19, 2006, post received a written request for technical assistance on AI from the CVO. The request was forwarded to USDA Washington for consideration. The CVO and representatives from the Poultry Association of Nigeria are planning to attend the National Poultry Improvement Plan Conference in Portland, Oregon, September 7-9, 2006. The CVO is scheduled to also visit the USDA/APHIS Emergency Center in Riverdale, Maryland on September 11-12 to consult with USDA officials.
Browne